

News and Updates from SCDSS - November 2021

State Director's Angle **Practice an Attitude of Gratitude**

By State Director Michael Leach

This month at SCDSS, we are reminded to embrace November as a month of gratitude. No matter where you live, no matter how the pandemic is affecting you, no matter what political or social issues are surrounding us, this month let us each be intentional in taking steps toward building a healthier mental well-being.

In order to grow your gratitude muscle- this month we challenge you each day to name three things you are grateful for. Try to be original each day and think of new things (no repeats and no skips)! On days when you struggle to think of something, dig deep! Those are the days when you can truly stretch and grow your gratitude muscle. #Grateful



CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



*SCDSS Child Welfare Services has adopted the theme
Better Together: Enhancing Practice, Transforming Lives
to reflect our commitment to achieve best outcomes for the children, youth and families we serve. This means working **hand-in-hand** with families, supported by a statewide network of service providers, judicial and education partners, foster parents, the faith community and so many others who are dedicated to helping families thrive.*

#BetterTogether

Nov 2021

**National
Adoption
Month**

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES



*"Every child
deserves to
grow up
feeling safe
and loved."*

Adoption Month Focuses on Older and Sibling Youth in Foster Care

Governor Henry McMaster proclaimed November as Adoption Month in South Carolina. Additionally, the state is recognizing Monday, November 22nd as Adoptions Day in the state. The day is set aside for day-long hearings to finalize adoptions in four judicial circuits. More than 60 children are scheduled to be adopted by 42 families in family courts in Anderson, Charleston, Horry, and Sumter Counties.

As National Adoption Month begins, 168 children in the state's foster care system are legally free for adoption and waiting for a permanent place to call home – a "forever family." The SC Department of Social Services reports that 118 of these youths are ages 10-17.

"Every child deserves to live and grow in a loving, caring, and supportive home," said Michael Leach, DSS State Director. "We are grateful to those who take children in and make them part of their forever family. We also recognize the great need for families to adopt older youth, who often age out of the system before finding homes. Making these connections help them to become independent, productive adults."

All year long, SCDSS works diligently with community partners to find families that best match the unique needs of every child awaiting adoption. November offers the chance to join the U.S. DHHS [Children's Bureau's](#) efforts to increase awareness and bring attention to the need for permanent families for children and youth in foster care. This year's national theme, "Every Conversation Matters," emphasizes the need to secure safe and stable family connections for older youth and teens. Here are key steps in becoming a forever family for a young person:

- Make the call to HeartFelt Calling at (888) 828-3555 and fill out an application or visit www.heartfeltcalling.org.
- Attend training to help identify what makes your family the best fit for a waiting young person.
- Meet with an Adoption Specialist for interviews in your home. Submit medical forms and references. Complete your home's fire and sanitation inspections.
- A selection committee matches a young person with your family and shares their full background and unique needs.
- Meet the young person and begin getting to know each other with visits and overnight stays. You are now on the way to your final adoption day!

Families interested in adoption can view online profiles of South Carolina's waiting children at [SCDSS Adoptions](#), the [SC Heart Gallery](#), and [AdoptUSKids](#). Throughout the remainder of the month, DSS will be highlighting the stories of parents who are opening their homes and hearts and expanding their families through adoption.



DSS Joins Partnership to Reduce and Prevent Child Maltreatment Fatalities

The South Carolina Department of Social Services is teaming up with child welfare leaders from across the nation to improve child safety and realign child welfare toward a more preventative, child and family well-being system. This partnership has led to the National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS). Supported by Casey Family Programs, NPCS members share key data with the goal of improving case outcomes.

Enhancing the ability of child welfare agencies to share data and use data to identify and protect children at risk of maltreatment or fatality will help save children's lives. To strengthen accountability, promote collaboration, and improve child safety outcomes, members of this partnership will share data and apply a set of strategies. Those strategies include implementing a standardized platform for critical incident review and reporting of data, comparing critical incident and team culture data, sharing cross-jurisdictional safety notices, and more.

By adopting a public health approach that links CPS agencies with community partners, members aim to build support for and resilience within families before crises occur. Through the implementation of these recommendations, we will be creating a learning laboratory, building from pilot sites, testing ideas, and learning from one another. By implementing more proactive rather than reactive strategies, we hope to enhance quality improvement, reduce the current rate of workforce instability, and address the cycle of blame that occurs in response to critical incidents. Learn more about the collaboration through [recommendations and findings](#) of the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities.

Making Children's Mental Health a Priority

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and Children's Hospital Association



have declared a [national emergency in children's mental health](#). Officials with the organizations say the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic brought on physical isolation, uncertainty, fear, and grief. Researchers with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found between March and October 2020, [emergency department visits](#) for mental health emergencies rose by 24% for children ages 5-11 years and 31% for children ages 12-17 years. In addition, emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts increased [nearly 51%](#) among girls ages 12-17 years in early 2021 compared to the same period in 2019. To learn more about strategies to address children's mental health concerns, click [here](#).

ECONOMIC SERVICES

Family Assistance | Early Care & Education | Employment Services



Making Childcare More Affordable for South Carolina Families

Rate Changes Impact Reimbursement Rates in the State

SCDSS is taking additional steps to assist parents as they balance work and child care. Starting October 1, 2021, SCDSS' Division of Early Care and Education implemented a new reimbursement rate structure for payments issued to child care providers participating in ABC Quality and accepting SC Voucher recipients. Overall, that means increases in the maximum amount providers are reimbursed. The new structure is based on the individual age of the child as opposed to a grouping of ages. Read more [here](#).

The rate restructure is not automatic and requires providers to apply for a rate increase. For more information, please call the SC Voucher Program at 1-800-262-4416.



Support Available for Parents and Child Care Providers

The SCDSS Division of Early Care and Education continues to offer financial assistance for child care for working families that have income at or below 300% of the federal poverty level. Information and an application for parents can be found on www.scchildcare.org under News and Announcements.



Emergency Allotments (Supplements) for Existing SNAP Households

Effective August 1, 2021, the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) announced the continuation of the federally-approved Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) emergency allotments (supplements) to all South Carolina SNAP households.

Since March 2020, the assignment of emergency SNAP allotments (supplements) has brought all authorized households up to the maximum benefit allotment, based on household size, regardless of income.

All program rules, including verification of income, are not waived due to this emergency supplement process.

As DSS receives monthly, federal approval, eligible SNAP recipients will receive their monthly benefit on their normal schedule at the regular allotment amount. The emergency supplement will be issued separately and may show up on a SNAP household's EBT card within 48 hours after their regular allotment amount.

Apply for SNAP online.



Connecting Job Seekers with Career Opportunities

DSS co-sponsored a community job fair at the Drew Wellness Center in Columbia on October 21st. There were 30 employers on hand and 172 job seekers present at the event. Pictured right, are DSS State Director Michael Leach, John Timmons, and Rhonda Ginn.

Visit the [DSS Employment Services Tools and Resources webpage](#) for updates and announcements of job fairs and recruitment events happening across the state.



ATTENTION JOB SEEKERS

Who Receive SNAP or TANF...

Each year DSS helps find jobs for thousands of recipients of [TANF](#) (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and [SNAP](#) (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits. Research shows that children are more likely to escape a life of poverty if their parents enter the workforce.

DSS is committed to continuing to help people in South Carolina find employment quickly and to develop the skills necessary to obtain careers in fields where jobs are available and in demand.

If you are, or know of, a recipient of either SNAP or TANF benefits who needs assistance finding employment, click on the buttons below for resources and assistance.

**Employment
Services Contact Form**

**Job Fair Announcements &
Employment Tools**

DSS Helps SC Employers Build a Quality Workforce

The [SCDSS Division of Employment Services](#) works to support business owners who hire **SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and **TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program participants entering the workforce. When you hire our customers, you become eligible for a variety of benefits, incentives and supports designed to meet your specific needs. Hiring through DSS Employment Services programs provides businesses and new employees a promising future. We assist with:

- Tax credit opportunities for employers
- Workforce Consultants statewide
- Vocational assessments
- Pre-screened job referrals
- Background screening
- Ongoing assistance



Click here to view a [video](#) about how our partnership with Homes of Hope in Greenville, SC is changing lives!

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES



New Clerks of Courts Hear from Child Support Services

*By Tim Mose, Child Support
Services Division Director*

The South Carolina Clerks of Court held their annual Fall Conference October 3-7, 2021 at the Embassy Suites at Kingston Plantation in Myrtle Beach. As part of the conference agenda, the Clerks of Court invited staff from the [Child Support Services Division \(CSSD\)](#) to make a presentation on Tuesday afternoon on child support incentives and unit cost

reimbursement, which are two topics that routinely generate questions from long-time and newly-elected Clerks of Court. In addition to the presentation, Tim Mose, Glenn Hastie, and Roger Bryant manned a round table from Monday afternoon through Wednesday to answer specific questions from individual Clerks of Court regarding incentives and unit cost reimbursement and any other child support-related topics. The CSSD staff also brought a "report card" for each of the 46 Clerks of Court which provided data on:

- Recent performance against the five federal child support performance standards
- Recent incentive payments
- Recent unit cost reimbursement.

While at the conference, the CSSD staff handed out report cards to 32 Clerks of Court and met with over 15 Clerks of Court and/or their staff to discuss the data provided. The Clerks of Court shared with CSSD on several topics, such as First Amendment audits, that could affect the CSSD. The Clerks' of Court spring and fall conferences are great opportunities to share and gain information that enhances the Child Support program in South Carolina and enriches the relationship CSSD has with the Clerks of Court.

We expect the online application to be available to the public during the first half of 2022 and are continually committed to future innovations that enhance our service to SC children and families.

CHILD SUPPORT Customer Service Portal



A secure way for parents to access important information about their case. Parents will have access to view:

- Payment information
- Hearing dates
- Enforcement measures in place
- Announcements affecting their case

The Customer Service Portal can be used to update:

- Address, phone, email
- Employment information

To access the portal, you will need to create a unique **USER ID** and **PASSWORD**.
To get started, call 1-800-768-5858



clientportal.dss.sc.gov

DSS Child Support Customer Service Portal

(Click the button above to access portal now.)

A secure way for parents to access important child support case information any time, any day.

Whether paying or receiving support, parents can create a unique user ID and password to view payment information, hearing dates, enforcement measures in place, and receive occasional announcements affecting their case. The portal can also be used to update address, phone number, employment and email information.

ADULT ADVOCACY

Adult Protective Services | Domestic Violence Prevention
Protection. Respect. Independence.



Adult Advocacy Staff Participate in Alzheimer's Walk

By Kelly Cordell, Adult Advocacy Director

The 2021 Walk to End Alzheimer's took place Saturday, October 30th at Segra Park in Columbia. There were over 1,340 participants and 98% of the \$195,000 goal was attained! Participants were asked to carry flag flowers signifying a commitment to ending the disease. It was a beautiful and colorful display over the course of a two-mile walk, ending in the outfield at Segra Park. Participants who raised a certain amount were able to have family members' or friends' pictures on the

jumbotron during and after the event. DSS was represented by staff in the [Adult Advocacy Division](#) including Tammy Fulwood, Selina Salley, and Brandi Nerud, as well as their spouses (pictured above). More on the event can be found [here](#).

Fighting Domestic Violence

By Kijuana Tate, Lee County Director

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October) may be over, but DSS is proud to recognize Bishopville Mayor Grady Brown, who recently signed a proclamation to emphasize the importance of ongoing awareness efforts to combat the issue. Pictured is Lee County Director (Center) Kijuana Tate, along with officials with the Bishopville Police Department and the YWCA of the Upper Lowlands.



KNOW THE FACTS...

Domestic Violence is present in every community, across all demographics. The effects of abuse suffered can be both physical and mental and can last a lifetime. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. In one year, that equals more than 10 million people. To learn more about making a difference, click [here](#).



Click here to visit our website to learn more about Adult Protective Services

SCDSS Highlights





DSS Recognizes November Employees of the Month

On November 9th, seven DSS professionals were recognized by State Director Michael Leach as agency Employees of the Month. Recognized for their hard work and leading with *Competence, Courage, and Compassion* for November are:

Chelsea Smith, Strategic Planning and Innovation Division, State Office; Caitlin Price, Information Technology, Columbia; Regina Parvin, Legal Services Division, Charleston; Miranda Wertz Jumper, Child Welfare Services, Edgefield; Brittany Johnson,

Economic Services, State Office; Amy Partain, Adult Advocacy Division, Anderson; and Julie Hetzel, Child Support Services Division, Columbia.

The recognition celebration with Director Leach was held virtually due to the ongoing pandemic. Each honoree has the use of a designated parking space for the entire month. Honorees will also receive a DSS lapel pin, a gift card donated by A Home for Me to be used to purchase lunch, and an announcement sent to their local newspaper. Congratulations!



It Takes a Community to Make a Difference

On October 28th, multiple county directors took part in the "It Takes a Community" event sponsored by [Safe Passage Inc.](#) The organization serves victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.

The event took place at Brakefield at Riverwalk in Rock Hill. The evening included both live and silent auctions. Shown here are Nakia Griffin, Lancaster County Director; Laura Wasson, York County Director; and Sandra Johnson, Chester County Director.



SCFPA's Social Worker of the Month

DSS would like to congratulate Alexis Fishburne with the Lancaster County DSS office, who has been named the [South Carolina Foster Parent Association's](#) Social Worker of the Month for November 2021. Thank you, Alexis, for outstanding service to children and families!

Partner & Community Spotlights

Kinship Caregiver Conference Offers Communication and Resources

DSS was excited to take part in the [HALOS](#) Kinship Caregiver Conference in Charleston on October 30th. The free event was held at the Charleston Marriot hotel and provided caregivers the opportunity to network and learn more about community resources. SCDSS State Director Michael Leach and Deputy State Director of Child Welfare Services Karen Bryant joined others at the event that helps connect kinship caregivers with needed resources and support.

Breakout sessions included talks on family communication, self-care, parenting children who have experienced trauma, and legal and custody issues. Dr. Gerald Smalls, Esq., who is the Chair and Associate Professor of Law and Accounting of the Johnson College of Business and Economics at USC Upstate, was the featured speaker.



Court Liaison Program at UofSC Children's Law Center

By Cody Lidge, CIP Director, Children's Law Center

For nearly ten years, the Court Liaison Program has represented

a special partnership between DSS and the USC Children's Law Center (CLC) and has become a robust court observation and Continuous Quality Insurance (CQI) tool for the state.

In 2004, the SC Court Administration hired one person to conduct file reviews on cold child protective services (CPS) cases in a few counties to help DSS develop a strategy to bring those cases back to life. After seeing success with this limited model over the next several years, DSS approached CLC in 2012 about formalizing a court observation structure in Richland, Charleston, Florence, and Spartanburg counties. Four years later, the program expanded statewide. Our court liaisons bring a wealth of experience in child welfare to the program. A few of them are lawyers with experience working with CPS or child support cases. Several of the liaisons have experience working as foster care case managers/supervisors or even paralegals. The benefit they offer is a fresh, neutral look at every CPS case in the DSS system with court oversight.

Our partnership with DSS is one the Children's Law Center holds very dear, and we look forward to continuing the partnership through our liaison program. We work on behalf of the youth served by the DSS and in the spirit of improving the lives of families who need our help the most.

Click here to learn more about the [USC Children's Law Center](#).

South Carolina Home Care & Hospice Association Annual Conference

On Monday, October 25th, IMPH (SC Institute of Medicine and Public Health) Executive Director Maya Pack spoke at the 2021 [South Carolina Home Care & Hospice Association](#) Annual Conference. She discussed the initiatives of IMPH alongside leadership from the South Carolina Department of Social Services, South Carolina Department on Aging, and SC DHEC. Thanks to SCHCHA's panel moderator, Shannon Pointer, and SCHCHA for hosting.



Pictured from left to right: Connie Munn, Director, Director on Aging; Maya Pack, Executive Director of SCIMPH; Michael Leach, DSS State Director; Shannon Pointer, Vice President of Hospice and Palliative Care at the South Carolina Home Care & Hospice Association; and L. Brannon Traxler, MD, Director of Public Health at SC DHEC.

South Carolina DAODAS

Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services

PAIRS Program Highlights Services

By Michelle Greco Cunningham, Program Manager
II/DAODAS Liaison

The [South Carolina Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services \(DAODAS\)](#) has partnered with DSS for the last 21 years to provide the PAIRS (Partners in Achieving Independence through Recovery and Self-Sufficiency) program. The PAIRS program provides funding for room and board, transitional services, and case management services for clients of DSS and their dependent children who need substance use disorder (SUD) treatment. The program facilitates quality services through the provision of substance use disorder (SUD) residential, education, assessment, and coordinated counseling services to all those (TANF-eligible and/or open child –welfare cases; excluding SNAP only cases) who are determined to need SUD services and help them become self-sufficient. The goal is to enhance their employability and ability to effectively parent, protect, and reunify with their child(ren).

Currently, there are five residential sites – Serenity Place (Greenville County), Chrysalis Center (Florence County), Charleston Center (Charleston County), Sumter Women's Recovery Center (Sumter County), and Keystone Substance Abuse Services (York County). Transitional funds are available to all 31 of the state's county alcohol and drug abuse authorities for DSS clients who needed assistance transitioning back to their communities and accessing a continuum of "wrap-around" services that foster family self-sufficiency.

For more information, contact Michelle Cunningham at Michelle.Cunningham@dss.sc.gov.



Serving the Needs of Foster Children

By Josie Jones, Spartanburg County Director

[PS I Love You Ministries](#) is a nonprofit faith-based ministry that serves the needs of foster children in Spartanburg County and surrounding areas. The resource center provides awareness and support for foster care through fundraisers, community awareness events, as well as meeting the physical and emotional needs of foster children and foster parents through their resource center. PS I Love You also supports Spartanburg County DSS through appreciation events for our staff. Anytime there is a need, PS I Love You is quick to help get that need filled. On Saturday, November 6, 2021, Spartanburg County DSS staff, Erin Baucom, Melinda Lynn, and Upstate Regional Performance Coach, Kim Gist (pictured left to right), had the

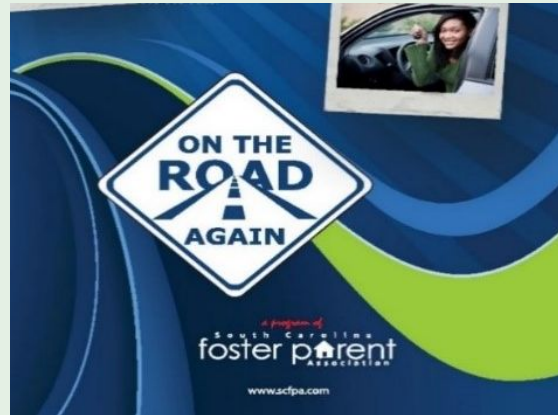
pleasure of participating in the PS I Love You 2021 Walk for Hope 5K. It was a time to see old and meet new friends all working together to raise awareness and support for children who are in foster care.

On the Road Again

Do you have a used car or truck that you no longer need, but you do not think you can get much for it? Before you try to sell it or trade it in, why not consider donating it to help the [South Carolina Foster Parent Association](#)?

There is a desperate need for used vehicles and all cars donated to the ["On the Road Again" program](#) go to help deserving foster care youth.

Your donation could make a huge difference in the life of a young person who lacks transportation. They may be trying to get to school or work or need help to gain independence. To find out how you can make a lasting, positive impact, call Brian Marion at 803-665-9225.



Report abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

DSS
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL SERVICES

1-888-CARE4US

Click the red "Report Abuse" button to make an online report of suspected abuse and/or neglect, now!



Report Abuse

Reporters may remain anonymous or provide contact information

to receive follow up on the outcome of their report.



SC Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202-1520
www.DSS.sc.gov



SC Department of Social Services | P.O. Box 1520, 1535 Confederate Ave., Columbia, SC 29202

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